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**ANN BROWN
CHAIRMAN
U.S. CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION**
**REMARKS AT
AMERICAN NEWS WOMEN'S CLUB
WASHINGTON, D.C.
MAY 11, 2000**

2000 MAY 12 A 8:03

(Carol Channing - Guam)

I ONCE READ A STORY ABOUT THE TIME GEORGE
BERNARD SHAW SENT WINSTON CHURCHILL TWO TICKETS
AND A NOTE THAT READ:

"ENCLOSED ARE TWO TICKETS TO THE FIRST-NIGHT
PERFORMANCE OF MY NEW PLAY.

BRING A FRIEND -- IF YOU HAVE ONE."

CHURCHILL SENT A NOTE BACK:

"DEAR GBS: UNFORTUNATELY I AM ENGAGED ON THAT
NIGHT.

COULD I HAVE TWO TICKETS FOR THE SECOND NIGHT --
IF THERE IS ONE?"

THIS IS MY FIRST PERFORMANCE HERE – AND I AM
HONORED THAT YOU INVITED ME TO SPEAK ABOUT
KEEPING FAMILIES SAFE.

PERHAPS YOU REMEMBER THE STORY OF "THE
LITTLE ENGINE THAT COULD."

TEN YEARS BEFORE I GOT TO CPSC, DALE
RUSSAKOFF WROTE AN ARTICLE IN THE WASHINGTON
POST CALLED "THE LITTLE AGENCY THAT CAN'T."

IT WAS ABOUT CPSC.

SHE CALLED THE AGENCY (QUOTE)

"A COMMISSION STOCKED WITH POLITICAL
CONSERVATIVES WHO HAD NO BACKGROUND IN
PRODUCT SAFETY."

SHE DETAILED THE DECIMATION OF STAFF.

THE BUDGET CUTS.

THE COMPLETE INABILITY TO DO THE JOB THEY
WERE ASKED TO DO.

SHE WAS ABSOLUTELY RIGHT.

AND SO, WHEN VICE PRESIDENT GORE SWORE ME
IN IN 1994, I HAD MY DOUBTS.

COULD THIS 57 YEAR OLD GRANDMOTHER COME
IN TO RUN AN AGENCY THAT HAD ALWAYS SEEMED TO
ME TO BE ALL BUN AND NO BEEF?

NOW, AFTER SIX YEARS, I CAN LOOK BACK AND SAY:
YES WE COULD.

EVEN THE REPUBLICAN CONGRESS AGREES. IN
JULY OF LAST YEAR THEY REAPPOINTED ME TO A
SECOND TERM.

(PAUSE)

AT CPSC OUR MISSION IS TO SAVE LIVES AND
REDUCE INJURIES TO AMERICAN FAMILIES.

WE OVERSEE ABOUT 15,000 TYPES OF PRODUCTS THAT ADD PLEASURE TO LIFE FOR MOST BUT CAN POSE DANGER TO SOME.

IN FACT, EACH YEAR THERE ARE OVER 29 MILLION INJURIES -- AND ABOUT 22,000 DEATHS RELATED TO THOSE PRODUCTS.

THERE IS A SOLID DIFFERENCE SINCE WE CAME TO CPSC IN 1994.

WE HAVE BROUGHT THE AGENCY BACK TO LIFE.

YOU CAN SEE THE DIFFERENCE WHEN IT COMES TO CIVIL PENALTIES.

IN 1999 WE ASSESSED MORE THAN TEN TIMES THE AMOUNT OF CIVIL PENALTIES THAN WERE ASSESSED IN 1989.

WE'VE IMPROVED OUR TOLL-FREE HOTLINE. WHEN I CAME THERE WERE EIGHT LINES. NOW WE HAVE 96.

A RESPONSE TO A COMPLAINT USED TO TAKE AS MUCH AS 48 DAYS. NOW IT TAKES 48 HOURS.

ANOTHER DIFFERENCE -- WE DO RECALLS DIFFERENTLY.

OUR PREDECESSORS USED TO DO WHAT I CALL THE PAPER AIRPLANE APPROACH -- SAIL A LITTLE PRESS RELEASE OUT THE WINDOW HOPING IT HITS SOMEONE ON THE HEAD BELOW.

THEY HAD ONE FAX LINE IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS.

WE DO OUR BEST TO GET ATTENTION FOR OUR SAFETY EFFORTS -- ON TV, RADIO, FEATURES IN NEWSPAPERS.

WE HAVE LEARNED THAT THE MEDIA CAN BE AN ENORMOUS ALLY.

OTHER AGENCIES DREAD IT WHEN THEY HEAR REPORTERS WANT TO DO A STORY ON THEM.

WE LOVE IT.

I APPLAUD NEWSPAPERS -- LIKE THE WASHINGTON POST AND USA TODAY -- THAT HAVE CONSUMER COLUMNS.

AND THAT TREAT MAJOR RECALLS AND SAFETY STORIES AS FRONT-PAGE NEWS.

WE ADMIRE WHAT THE MORNING SHOWS HAVE DONE FOR CONSUMERS.

IN FACT, THE ONE QUESTION I AM ASKED MORE THAN ANY OTHER IS -- WHAT'S KATIE COURIC REALLY LIKE?

(PAUSE)

BY THE WAY THAT REMINDS ME

(RADER DOLL STORIES) --

1. BABY HAD LEAD IN HER HEAD -- WHEN WENT THROUGH X-RAY, THOUGHT IT WAS A BOMB AND HAD TO CALL THE BOMB SQUAD TO CHECK.
2. BABY IN OVERHEAD LUGGAGE RACK.

3. BABY STRAPPED IN, WITH WINGS PINNED ON.
4. NBC CAMERAMAN – FORGOT YOUR BABY.

NOW LET ME TELL YOU THE INSIDE STORY ABOUT THE LENGTHS WE WILL GO TO TO PUBLICIZE OUR RECALLS SO THAT EVERY PERSON IN THE U.S. HEARS ABOUT THEM.

RECENTLY WE HAD TO RECALL A PRODUCT THAT HAD RESULTED IN THE DEATH OF A CHILD

A SECOND CHILD NEARLY DIED – BUT HER ALERT FATHER WAS ON THE SCENE AND SAVED HER.

EVEN AFTER THE COMPANY RECALLED THE PRODUCT, ANOTHER LITTLE BOY DIED -- AND THERE WERE CLOSE CALLS WITH TWO OTHER CHILDREN.

AT FIRST, THE COMPANY RESISTED DOING A RECALL.

THEY SUGGESTED THE PARENTS WERE TO BLAME.

THERE WAS EVEN TALK ABOUT CHILD ABUSE.
WE COULDN'T GET THEM TO BUDGE, UNTIL
AFTER THE SECOND INCIDENT.

THEN THEY REALIZED THEY HAD TO DO A RECALL.
EVENTUALLY THE COMPANY CARRIED OUT A
MASSIVE MODEL RECALL CAMPAIGN – BUT INITIALLY
THEIR IDEA WAS TO DO IT QUIETLY, WITHOUT
PUBLICITY.

WE UNDERSTAND HOW CRUCIAL THE MEDIA'S
ROLE IS – SO DID THEY, BUT THEY TRIED TO
SOFTPEDAL IT.

I WANTED TO ANNOUNCE THIS IMPORTANT
RECALL ON A MORNING SHOW TO GET MAXIMUM
PUBLICITY – SO NO OTHER CHILD WOULD DIE IN THIS
WAY.

I KNEW IT WAS A STORY A MORNING SHOW
WOULD WANT.

AFTER ALL, THERE WAS A DEATH INVOLVED,
IT WAS A POPULAR PRODUCT, AND THERE WERE
MILLIONS OF THEM ON THE MARKET.

IT WAS NEWS.

BUT THE COMPANY DECIDED TO SLIP THEIR
VERSION OF THE STORY OUT LATE ON A MONDAY
NIGHT, RATHER THAN WAITING TO DO IT JOINTLY WITH
US ON WEDNESDAY, AS THEY HAD AGREED TO DO.

THE WHOLE POINT OF ISSUING PUBLIC NOTICE OF
A RECALL IS TO BE SURE THE PUBLIC HEARS ABOUT IT.

WE PLAN OUR ANNOUNCEMENTS CAREFULLY TO
ENSURE MAXIMUM EXPOSURE.

WE DON'T ISSUE THEM IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT.

I WAS ON VACATION IN FLORIDA WHEN THE STAFF
CALLED TO TELL ME WHAT THE COMPANY HAD DONE.

I WENT ON THE WARPATH.

OUR PUBLIC AFFAIRS DIRECTOR TRIED TO REACH
THE PRODUCER OF THE TODAY SHOW, JEFF ZUCKER.

IT WAS TOO LATE TO GET ANYONE AT THE STUDIO
– SO HE TRIED EVERY JEFF ZUCKER IN THE NEW YORK
PHONE BOOK.

I HAD KATIE COURIC'S HOME TELEPHONE NUMBER
– AND WAS LUCKY ENOUGH TO FIND HER AT HOME.

SHE GAVE ME JEFF'S NUMBER.

I REACHED HIM AT HOME AT 9 PM. AND HE GOT IT
RIGHT AWAY.

HE SAID – IF I COULD GET TO NEW YORK BY THE
NEXT MORNING, THEY WOULD REARRANGE THE
WHOLE SHOW AND PUT ME ON TO ANNOUNCE THE
RECALL.

YOU NEVER SAW A LADY ORGANIZE SO FAST.

I WAS ON A PLANE AT 3 AM.

AND THEY PUT ME ON IN THE FIRST HALF HOUR,
JUST AFTER 7:00 A.M., TO ANNOUNCE THE RECALL.

I MADE SURE THE PUBLIC GOT THE FULL STORY.

(PAUSE)

INFANT SUFFOCATION IS HIGH ON OUR LIST OF CONCERNS.

EACH YEAR OVER 2700 BABIES DIE OF SIDS (SUDDEN INFANT DEATH SYNDROME).

RESEARCH HAS SHOWN THAT AS MANY AS 900 SIDS DEATHS A YEAR MAY BE RELATED TO SUFFOCATION FROM SOFT BEDDING.

LAST YEAR, ON THE BASIS OF NEW RESEARCH, WE ISSUED A SAFETY ALERT ON THIS SUBJECT TOGETHER WITH THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS.

THE NEW MESSAGE: WHEN YOU PUT BABIES UNDER 12 MONTHS TO SLEEP, REMOVE FROM THE CRIB ALL SOFT BEDDING PRODUCTS – PILLOWS, QUILTS, COMFORTERS, AND SHEEPSKINS.

WE KNEW PEDIATRICIANS WOULD HELP US GET THAT LIFESAVING MESSAGE OUT.

BUT WE KNEW TOO THAT PEOPLE WERE GETTING A VERY DIFFERENT MESSAGE WHEN THEY WENT INTO STORES TO SHOP FOR BABIES.

STORES OUTDID THEMSELVES TO MAKE THEIR CRIBS LOOK BEAUTIFUL -- STUFFED WITH FLUFFY QUILTS AND COMFORTERS THAT THEY HOPED THEIR CUSTOMERS WOULD FIND IRRESISTIBLE.

WHAT LOVING PARENT OR GENEROUS GRANDPARENT WOULD NOT WANT TO BUY SOMETHING THAT LOOKED SO APPEALING?

WHAT THOSE DISPLAYS DIDN'T SAY WAS THAT FOR INFANTS, THAT BEAUTIFUL SOFT BEDDING COULD BE DEADLY.

HERE'S THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY.

THE TRADE ASSOCIATION THAT REPRESENTS MANY OF THE MANUFACTURERS OF SOFT BEDDING -- THE JUVENILE PRODUCTS MANUFACTURERS ASSOCIATION -- WOULD NOT HELP US GET THIS NEW SAFETY MESSAGE OUT.

THEY NOT ONLY DRAGGED THEIR FEET – THEY EVEN SENT A LETTER THAT DISTORTED WHAT CPSC WAS DOING – AND THEY CONTINUED TO GIVE OUTDATED AND INCORRECT INFORMATION ABOUT SOFT BEDDING IN CRIBS.

WE SPOKE TO JPMA ABOUT THIS ISSUE REPEATEDLY, BUT THEY STILL DIDN'T ACT.

SO WE DECIDED TO GO AROUND THEM TO BIG RETAILERS AND TO THE MEDIA.

WE KNEW GETTING THE RETAILERS TO AGREE TO CHANGE THEIR DISPLAYS WOULDN'T BE EASY.

AFTER ALL, THEY WERE SELLING MILLIONS OF DOLLARS WORTH OF SOFT BEDDING, AND NO RETAILER WANTS TO CUT SALES.

FOR SEVERAL MONTHS WE WORKED HARD TO HAMMER OUT AN AGREEMENT WITH RETAILERS THAT WOULD ACHIEVE OUR SAFETY GOAL – AND THAT THEY COULD LIVE WITH.

WE SUCCEEDED.

ON MARCH 14 WE ANNOUNCED A SAFETY INITIATIVE WITH CONSCIENTIOUS RETAILERS WHO HAD OVER 75% OF THE BABY BEDDING MARKET – THE BIGGEST NAMES IN THE BUSINESS -- BABIES R US, IKEA, J.C. PENNEY, K-MART, LANDS END, SEARS AND TARGET.

I APPEARED ON A MORNING SHOW, AND THERE WAS AN ARTICLE IN USA TODAY.

LOCAL TELEVISION STATIONS, USING OUR VIDEO NEWS RELEASE, REACHED OVER A MILLION VIEWERS.

THIS COVERAGE HELPED GET THE WORD OUT THAT BEGINNING THIS SPRING, CUSTOMERS OF THOSE SEVEN RETAILERS WILL NO LONGER SEE CRIBS MADE UP WITH PILLOWS, QUILTS AND COMFORTERS IN THEM.

THIS IS A TERRIFIC CHANGE.

AND – AT LONG LAST -- THE JPMA HAS NOW SENT A LETTER TO THEIR MEMBERS WITH THE CORRECT INFORMATION.

(PAUSE)

YOU KNOW, THE WORK WE DO INVOLVES
NOTHING LESS THAN PROTECTING THE LIVES OF THOSE
MOST PRECIOUS TO US.

OUR FAMILIES.

AND BECAUSE I FEEL SO STRONGLY ABOUT THAT, I
CAN'T CLOSE WITHOUT TELLING YOU ABOUT
SOMETHING THAT HAS IMPRESSED ME MORE AND
MORE OVER THE YEARS I'VE HELD THIS POSITION: HOW
MANY PEOPLE WHO HAVE SUFFERED THE MOST
TERRIBLE PERSONAL TRAGEDIES, FIND MEANING IN
HELPING OTHERS.

I KNOW THIS BECAUSE OVER THE YEARS I HAVE
BEEN AT CPSC, I HAVE MADE A POINT OF TELEPHONING
PARENTS WHO HAVE LOST A CHILD IN AN INCIDENT
INVOLVING A CONSUMER PRODUCT.

PICKING UP THE PHONE ISN'T EASY. I WORRY
ABOUT INTRUDING ON THEIR PRIVATE GRIEF.

I'VE FOUND, THOUGH, THAT PARENTS ARE NOT ONLY RECEPTIVE, BUT HAVE VOLUNTEERED TO HELP SOLVE THE SAFETY PROBLEMS THAT CAUSED THEIR CHILD'S DEATH.

THEY ARE EAGER TO DO WHATEVER THEY CAN, EVEN IF IT IS JUST WITHIN THEIR OWN COMMUNITIES.

THAT IS WHAT THE MOTHER OF 3 YEAR OLD PEYTON DID IN HER SMALL TOWN OF ASHFORD, ALABAMA.

PEYTON WAS PLAYING ON HER SWING, WHILE HER GRANDFATHER WAS CUTTING WEEDS IN THE YARD.

HE WAS USING A WEED TRIMMER WITH A REPLACEMENT HEAD THAT WAS MADE WITH A METAL CHAIN – THE WEED WIZARD.

THE END LINK BROKE OFF THE METAL CHAIN AND FLEW THROUGH THE AIR AS IF IT WERE A PIECE OF DEADLY SHRAPNEL – TRAVELLING 240 MILES PER HOUR.

IT HIT PEYTON IN THE TEMPLE, PENETRATED HER SKULL AND LODGED THREE INCHES INSIDE HER BRAIN.

SHE SUBSEQUENTLY DIED.

HER PARENTS HAD TO MAKE THE AWFUL DECISION TO TAKE HER OFF LIFE SUPPORT.

I LEARNED THAT TWO MONTHS LATER PEYTON'S MOM STARTED GOING TO LOCAL HARDWARE STORES – ONE AFTER ANOTHER, TELLING PEOPLE NOT TO BUY THE WEED WIZARD AND IMPLORING THE STORES TO GET IT OFF THEIR SHELVES.

WE ALSO DISCOVERED THERE WERE OVER 40 OTHER SERIOUS INJURIES FROM THE WEED WIZARD.

WE RECALLED ALL THE WEED WIZARDS NATIONWIDE LAST WEEK.

I CALLED PEYTON'S MOM TO TELL HER ABOUT THE RECALL THE NIGHT BEFORE I WAS TO ANNOUNCE IT ON A MORNING TV SHOW.

I TOLD HER WE WOULD HAVE A FRONT PAGE
STORY ABOUT THE RECALL IN USA TODAY – AND
THERE WOULD BE A VIDEO NEWS RELEASE THAT
WOULD REACH MILLIONS OF PEOPLE

SHE WEPT.

HER LOCAL PAPER, THE DOTHAN (ALABAMA)
EAGLE, PUT THE RECALL STORY ON PAGE ONE – AND
THEY QUOTED HER AS SAYING:

“IF WE CAN SAVE ONE OTHER CHILD, KEEP ONE
MORE CHILD FROM DYING, PEYTON’S DEATH WAS NOT
IN VAIN. NOW PEYTON CAN REST IN PEACE.”

(PAUSE)

I THINK TOO OF A WOMAN NAMED LYNN STARKS,
IN OKLAHOMA CITY.

SHE WENT TO WAKE HER THREE-YEAR OLD
DAUGHTER WHITNEY ONE MORNING, TO FIND
WHITNEY HAD WIGGLED HER BODY BETWEEN THE TOP
SLATS OF THE UPPER BUNK OF HER BUNK BED.

BUT HER HEAD GOT CAUGHT.

HER MOTHER FOUND HER HANGING, HER BODY
RIGID, COLD AND BLUE.

LYNN WANTED TO ENSURE THAT HER DAUGHTER'S
DEATH WOULD NOT BE IN VAIN.

SHE WORKED WITH US ON OUR RECALL.

SHE WENT ON "GOOD MORNING AMERICA" WITH
ME.

SHE GOT THE OKLAHOMA LEGISLATURE TO PASS A
LAW ELIMINATING THE SALE OF UNSAFE BUNK BEDS IN
OKLAHOMA.

SHE CAME TO TWO HEARINGS AT CPSC ON A
PENDING BUNK BED RULE – AT HER OWN EXPENSE.

AND ON DECEMBER 2, 1999, THE CONSUMER
PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION APPROVED A NEW
MANDATORY BUNK BED REGULATION THAT WILL
PREVENT COMPANIES FROM MARKETING UNSAFE BEDS
LIKE THE ONE THAT KILLED WHITNEY STARKS.

(PAUSE)

I COULD QUOTE YOU ALL THE STATISTICS YOU
WANT ABOUT LIVES THREATENED AND DOLLARS
SAVED IN THE AREA OF CONSUMER SAFETY.

BUT AS THE NOVELIST ARTHUR KOESTLER ONCE
WROTE: "STATISTICS DON'T BLEED."

NUMBERS DON'T TELL YOU WHAT IT'S LIKE TO SEE A
LOVED ONE THREATENED.

THEY DON'T TELL YOU WHAT IT'S LIKE TO LOSE A
CHILD.

WE'LL NEVER KNOW WHOSE LITTLE SON OR DAUGHTER
OUR EFFORTS HAVE SAVED.

THAT'S ALWAYS THE CASE WITH SAFETY ISSUES.

YOU DON'T SEE NEWSPAPER ARTICLES ABOUT THE
LITTLE GIRL WHO DIDN'T DIE IN A BUNK BED...

OR ABOUT THE BABY WHO DIDN'T DIE OF SIDS...

BUT THEY ARE OUT THERE.

AND THE FACT IS, THEY ARE OUT THERE IN
INCREASING NUMBERS BECAUSE OF THE WORK WE DO.

CPSC'S ANNUAL BUDGET IS ONLY ENOUGH TO RUN THE
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE FOR AN HOUR AND A HALF.

BUT WE'RE DOING A LOT.

WE'VE DONE IT BY CREATING PARTNERSHIPS WITH
COMPANIES, WITH CONSUMERS, WITH PARENTS, WITH
TOUGH REPORTERS WHO WOULDN'T HESITATE TO
CALL US ON A FALSE CLAIM.

WE'VE DONE IT BY GETTING RESULTS.

THE NEXT TIME I COME TO SPEAK TO YOU ... I'M
CONFIDENT WE'LL BE ABLE TO POINT TO MORE EXAMPLES
OF THE LIFESAVING THINGS WE HAVE DONE IN THAT SAME
SPIRIT.

FOR, UNLIKE A SHAW PLAY, WHEN IT COMES TO
SAFETY, THERE IS NO LAST ACT, THE CURTAIN NEVER
FALLS -- AND OUR WORK IS NEVER DONE.